

## Reference Books

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Editor

*Africa and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History*. Ed. by Richard M. Juang and Noelle Morrisette. Transatlantic Relations Series. Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-Clio, 2008. 3 vols. alkaline \$270 (ISBN 978-1-85109-441-7).

ABC-Clio's Transatlantic Relations Series is the result of the work of Professor Terry Rodenberg of Central Missouri State University, who in 1995 invited scholars to establish an educational and scholarly institution devoted to encouraging a transatlantic perspective. Out of that conference came the founding of the Maastricht Center for Transatlantic Studies and the emergence of transatlantic studies as an area of inquiry. The editor's stated purpose for this series is "to present historical, political, and cultural relationships that tie together both sides of the Atlantic Ocean" (xv). "The aim in a phrase is to explore the myriad of connections and interconnections of the Atlantic World" (xiii). *Africa and the Americas: Culture, Politics and History* is the sixth in the series. Other titles are *Britain and the Americas*, *France and the Americas*, *Germany and the Americas*, *Iberia and the Americas*, and *Ireland and the Americas*.

*Africa and the Americas* has a table of contents, an index, and several special features. The headings include "A Chronology of Africa and the Americas, 700–2007," "A Topic Finder" (hot topics), and four introductory essays: "Demography, Diaspora and International Relations," "Culture and Religion," "Economics and Trade," and "Arts, Literature and Sport." These provide broad overviews of the topics as they relate to Africa and the Americas. The work is illustrated with black-and-white photographs and paintings. Each article is signed and includes a list of references for further reading.

Included in this set are entries designed to illustrate the historical and present connections between Africa and the Americas. However, some such connections are tenuous and may not be evident to the average reader. An example is the section on the sinking of the luxury liner Titanic. It is always thought that there were no blacks on the ship, but there was one black man, a Haitian with a white wife. However, the connection that convinced the editors to include the disaster was that African Americans at the time took a leading role in composing songs and poems about the Titanic. This connection can only be considered an obscure one at best. Even more puzzling is the inclusion of an entry on the African American writer Jean Toomer, author of the famous novel *Cane* (Boni and Liveright, 1923). Toomer is tied to Africa because of his depiction of Southern blacks during the period between slavery and the civil rights era.

Fortunately, the entries that illustrate very apparent connections between Africa and the Americas far outnumber the ones that don't. An example of a solid entry with appar-

ent connections is the one on the African American writer Alex Haley, known for the novel *Roots: Saga of An American Family* (Doubleday, 1974), later made into a groundbreaking television mini-series. Haley traced his family ancestry back to Africa. Another solid entry is the section on African American Islam. This six-page section discusses the connection between African American Islam and the Muslim faith that was brought from Africa to the New World with the transatlantic slave trade.

For a comparison to works that are similar to this set, I consulted Sanders and Moore's *African Presence in the Americas* (Africa World Press, 1995), a one-volume text with chapters devoted to the African presence in Peru, Brazil, Canada, Ecuador, and Panama and dealing with subjects such as Afro-Nicaraguans, Afro-Cubans, and black business in the French West Indies. Lovejoy and Trotman's edited volume *Transatlantic Dimensions of Ethnicity in the African Diaspora* (Continuum, 2003), with coverage of the slave populations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, presents discussions on the condition of the slave populations and their subsequent influence, with chapters such as "Africanizing and Creolizing the Plantation Frontier of Trinidad, 1787–1838," "Ethnic Designations of the Slave Trade and The Reconstruction of the History of Transatlantic Slavery," and "Afro-Brazilian Communities of the Bight of Benin in the Nineteenth Century."

For an encyclopedic treatment of all aspects of the African influence in the Americas, *Africa and the Americas* is the only encyclopedia available. Recommended for large academic and public libraries.—M. Elaine Hughes, *Liaison Librarian for African American and African Studies, University Libraries, Georgia State University, Atlanta*

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*Chronology of American History*. By John C. Fredriksen. Facts On File Library of American History. New York: Facts On File, 2008. 4 vols. alkaline \$350 (ISBN 978-0-8160-6800-5).

Although the United States cannot boast of a history stretching back millennia, as may Egypt or China, the country nevertheless has a long and storied past of its own, as evidenced in the roughly twenty-five hundred pages of this four-volume set. Author John Fredriksen (PhD in American history) states in his introduction that among his goals are balance and inclusiveness, which he seems to feel are lacking in previous works of this type. The time span covered by the work stretches from the prehistoric era to the end of 2007, while the subject matter encompasses not only the standard military, political, and social developments but also architecture, business, exploration, science, slavery, women's issues, and a host of other topics. Emphasis is on contiguous United States, though various entries touch on the entire continent of North America and beyond, including Hawaii, Alaska, far-flung possessions such as American Samoa and Guam—even the moon is mentioned.

The set is presented in four broad divisions: *Volume I, Colonization and Independence, Beginnings to 1788*; *Volume II, Expansion and Civil War, 1789 to 1865*; *Volume III, Industry and Modernity, 1866 to 1920*; and *Volume IV, Challenges at Home*